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Athletes risk their lives by use of drugs, says BMA

The use of performance enhancing drugs is so deeply entrenched in all levels of sport that one in three GPs is likely to encounter a patient who uses anabolic steroids, claims a report published this week by the BMA.

The report states that drugs are commonly used not only by elite athletes but also at recreational level throughout British gyms. For some athletes the motivation to take drugs is media pressure to win or huge financial rewards. For others it is simply to improve their body image. Some athletes have said they would take a drug to enhance their performance, even if there was a risk it might kill them.

The report raises concern at the easy availability of steroids through the internet or on the black market. Poor quality black market products have been linked to a number of cases of poisoning, infection, and mental illness, it states.

Mark Hunter *Leeds*

Drugs in Sport: The Pressure to Perform is available from BMJ Books, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP

US report calls for tighter controls on complementary medicine

Complementary medical treatments such as acupuncture, massage, and herbal and nutritional treatments must be evaluated with the same standards of quality, rigour, and ethics as conventional treatments, states the US Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

"First class scientific research is crucial to helping people—and those who care for them—make the wisest healthcare decisions," said Dr James Gordon, the commission's chairman.

The commission, established two years ago by President Bill Clinton, was charged with making legislative and administrative



Nigeria promises free antiretroviral drugs to HIV positive soldiers

Nigeria is soon to begin free distribution of antiretroviral drugs to its HIV positive soldiers. Announcing the plan, Nigeria's defence minister, retired general Theophilus Danjuma, said it was imperative for the Nigerian military to do everything it could to prevent the rise in HIV cases among the soldiers.

"Unless this is done, you have an army, navy, and air force that are invalids," he warned. He said that many of the soldiers contracted HIV during peacekeeping missions. Nigerian soldiers (pictured above in Sierra Leone) have been sent on such missions to several countries on the west African coast.

Although the Nigerian military has not introduced compulsory testing, the authorities routinely test soldiers who go on duty overseas. Abiodun Raufu *Lagos*

recommendations to help develop public policies that would maximise the benefits, if any, of complementary medicine. It issued its report at the end of March and it can be accessed at www.whcccamp.hhs.gov Charles Marwick *Washington, DC*

NHS misses target for introducing electronic records

The NHS has completely missed last month's target to introduce electronic patient records across a third of acute hospitals—much as the medical profession had predicted. Department of Health officials admitted this month that only 3% of acute hospitals had introduced level 3 electronic patient records by 31 March, compared with the target of 35% set in its 1998 information technology (IT) strategy, Information for Health.

No results have been released

for the other seven targets for March set in the 1998 strategy, suggesting that they are also showing disappointing progress.

A level 3 electronic patient record for a single episode of care would cover four areas: prescribing details, tests and procedures ordered, test results, and the "integrated care pathway"—to project manage the patient's care.

Katherine Burke *London*

WHO targets environmental impact on child health

A publication that looks at how the environment affects children's health will be released in Brussels on Monday (15 April), at the start of the European Commission's Green Week.

Children, it says, might be the "canaries in the coalmines"—the

first people to show adverse health effects resulting from environmental factors, with possible lifelong implications for adults and children.

The 225 page document, a collaborative venture between the WHO's Regional Office for Europe and the European Environment Agency, is intended to promote a better understanding of children's health issues relating to the environment among scientists and professionals working in child health and environmental protection.

It says that children are particularly vulnerable to environmental threats because they breathe, eat, and drink more than adults in proportion to their body weight; they may be exposed for a longer time to such threats at a time when they are more sensitive; and their metabolism differs from that of adults.

The publication reflects the WHO's decision at its third ministerial conference on environment and health in London in 1999 to prioritise children's particular vulnerability and helps prepare the ground for the next conference in the series, to be held in Budapest in 2004.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Children's Health and Environment: A Review of Evidence can be accessed at www.who.it from 15 April.

Study associates viral infection with some childhood brain tumours

An epidemiological study carried out in the north west of England has shown for the first time that some types of childhood brain tumours may be associated with viral infection.

The study analysed 1045 cases of brain tumour in children, all from the Manchester Children's Tumour Registry and dating from 1954 to 1998. Results showed that more children who lived nearer to each other were diagnosed with two types of brain cancer—astrocytoma and ependymoma—than would have been expected by chance.